

## In This Issue...

### Lyndall Nairn, Lynchburg College

Our need for instantaneous communication and our desire to be up-to-date with all types of information suggest that we are becoming so absorbed in the present that we are losing our appreciation of what the people who have lived before us have contributed to our civilization. The students in core text programs that belong to the Association of Core Texts and Courses (ACTC) and the professors who teach in those programs are addressing this issue. The *Agora*, the journal of academic writing produced by students at Lynchburg College and other institutions belonging to ACTC, provides evidence that our students are drawing on the ideas of great writers and thinkers of the past to address significant issues in today's world.

The first article is written from the point of view of a faculty member teaching a core text. **Zach Sanzone**, a former graduate student at Lynchburg College and a high school English teacher, discusses his experience teaching Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in his tenth grade English class. Zach took a risk in trying to advance his students' critical thinking skills by setting up a similar situation to the Salem witch trials in his classroom: Zach falsely accused one of his students of plagiarizing an essay to see if the other students would support their friend or if they would abnegate their responsibility. Several years later as Zach's students were preparing to enter college, they reported that this highly formative classroom experience set their college application essays apart from others.

The author of the next article, **Brandon Gannicott**, a senior at Lynchburg College, won the Kendall North Award for the best essay in this issue of the *Agora* with his paper, "The Nature of God: A Comparative Analysis of *Young Goodman Brown* and 'The Tyger'." Brandon

uses Blake's poem and Hawthorne's story to address the problem of evil in a world created by a loving, omniscient God. Brandon indicates that our tendency to polarize good and evil as absolutes hinders our analysis of this problem, and he suggests that a more helpful approach involves considering a reciprocal relationship between the Creator and his/her creatures, where both good and evil play essential roles in the nature of God and in human life.

**Nathan Goldman**, a student at St John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, continues the theme of how to deal with evil and human suffering in his essay, "Playing with Leviathan: On Myth in the Book of Job." Nathan encourages his readers to view Job's suffering as a symbol of the human condition and to use the story as a prompt to question our expectations of mythical archetypes involving God, justice, success, evil, and misery.

**Jack Klempay**, a student at Columbia University, draws on both the Hebrew Bible and Homer in his essay, "Agriculture and Growing Up: Milk and Wine in *Genesis* and *The Odyssey*." Jack draws a convincing analogy between milk (the drink of babies) and wine (the drink of adults) to explain that the maturation process of individuals can be viewed as a reflection of the maturation process of human society as it has developed from nomadic herding, where milk is produced, to settled agriculture, where wine is produced.

Another writer who focuses on Homer is **Reile Slattery**, a student at Pepperdine University. In her essay, "The Extent of Destiny: Gods, People, and Fate in *The Iliad*," Reile considers the ancient Greeks' interpretation of the role of individual free will in relation to the role of fate and the intervention of the gods in humans' lives. Reile concludes that Homer and the ancient Greeks had a complex view of the interrelationships among these three factors influencing human destiny, particularly as the will of the gods seems to fluctuate randomly and

as some people use the idea of fate as a way of rationalizing their mistakes and unhappy events in their lives.

**Benjamin de la Piedra**, a student at Columbia University, used Plato's Republic as his main source in his essay, "Clinging to Education." Benjamin analyzes the educational process that a benevolent philosopher king must go through so that he can guide his citizens through the process of political degeneration of the city state to avoid everlasting tyranny. This connection between an effective educational system and harmonious civic life is relevant today as we consider how much money undergraduates are investing in their education in order to ensure their own future careers and the type of society they will be leading in the future.

**Brooke Bierz**, a student at Rhodes College, has examined the relationship between sisters in her essay, "Virgil Uncovered: Dido and Anna Present an Unexpected Lesson of Sisterhood." In the *Aeneid*, Virgil depicts the relationship between these two sisters as genuinely close, accepting, and loving, but Anna experiences a complex series of emotions, including despair and anger, when she realizes that Dido has tricked her into building a funeral pyre, which Dido then uses to commit suicide. Nevertheless, as Dido dies, Anna holds her in her arms, demonstrating that her caring, loving attitude towards her dying sister can overcome her negative emotions, so that we can recognize the depth and strength of this sisterly relationship, which Virgil has powerfully given the attention it deserves.

**Hilary Ball**, a student at St Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, has written an essay, entitled "Security vs. Glory or Security via Glory: Republican Discord and Harmony in Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy*." Hilary elaborates on Machiavelli's explanation for the five-hundred-year success story of the Roman Empire: the ancient Romans effectively

expended a lot of political and military energy on dealing with unrest among their own social classes, while at the same time fighting many wars with their neighbors. In this way, the skillful, simultaneous management of both internal and external conflicts served to strengthen the Roman Empire. Hilary notes the relevance of Machiavelli's observations of ancient Rome to governments in our own time: long-lived political success can only come out of effectively managing the current circumstances, not out of trying to apply any predetermined formulas.

**Michael Fogleman**, a student at St. John's College, Annapolis, has focused on Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometry in his essay, "Postulates in Geometry and Philosophy." Michael sees parallels in the work of mathematicians and philosophers as they try to define problems and to arrange the unknowns into solvable formats in order to advance knowledge. Needless to say, some problems, both in geometry and in philosophy, are more challenging than others.

**Jonathan Haggerty**, a student at Lynchburg College, in his essay, "Marx and Violent Revolution," challenges the widespread interpretation of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* that violence is necessary for the success of the Communist revolution. On the contrary, Jonathan asserts that Marx promoted non-violent revolution and considered violent revolutions to be ineffective. Jonathan then convincingly supports this iconoclastic interpretation of Marx by analyzing the plotlines of two novels written by socialist authors: Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*.

In her essay, "A Green Thumb on the Invisible Hand: Exploring Environmental Trade Policies," **Deirdre Scanlon** of Lynchburg College, considers the environmental effects of international trade. Deirdre discusses the shortcomings of the Kyoto Protocol and then

proposes a new cap and trade policy that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow global warming.

**Nicole Warkoski**, another Lynchburg College student, has taken on a controversial topic in her essay, “The Philosophy of Ethics as It Relates to Capital Punishment.” Nicole contrasts Kant’s discussion of reason and duty with John Stuart Mill’s support for utilitarianism, and she concludes that the argument against the death penalty is the stronger one. In considering the ethical ramifications of the death penalty, Nicole contends that Mill’s focus on the greatest amount of good for the largest number of people carries more weight than the retribution and deterrent arguments that can be deduced from Kant.

The next three essays were chosen as the best three presented at the ACTC student conference held at Shimer College in Chicago in March 2013. **Jacob Reilly** of the University of Dallas wrote “Emily Dickinson in Translation: A Study of the Latin Residuum in Dickinson’s Grammar.” As his title indicates, Jacob contends that the difficult and fragmented syntax of Emily Dickinson’s poetry can be explained by the influence of her study of Latin. **Rafael Sordili** of Concordia University wrote “Nothingness on the Move: A Discussion of Goethe’s *Faust Part One*.” Rafael claims that Faust is able to escape the despair of nihilism because he nurtures his will to live, recognizes and accepts his own limitations, and is willing to replace any outmoded values with more pragmatic ones. **David Bayless** of Samford University, wrote “A Philosophical Journey through *Miracles*, the *Metaphysics*, and *Summa Contra Gentiles*.” David explains how his reading of C. S. Lewis, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas led him on a journey from being an irreligious science enthusiast to becoming a theistic explorer of the connections between science and philosophy.

The final essay in this issue of the *Agora* was written in Lynchburg College's Senior Symposium, the capstone general education course in which students combine ideas from Lynchburg College Symposium Readings (LCSR) and public lectures on contemporary issues together with their own experiences and opinions. **Leah Bigl**, who won the LCSR Program Director's Award for her Senior Symposium essay, "The Value in Emphasizing Critical Thinking," considers reasons for the recent decrease in the rate of immunizations against communicable childhood diseases, such as measles, mumps, and rubella. This decrease can be traced back to the publicity given to a 1998 study that claimed a correlation between autism and the MMR vaccination. Even though this study has been widely discredited, many people in the general public still continue to believe it and have become reluctant to immunize their children. In the past few years, we have seen the expected public health outcome: an increase in the rate of these communicable diseases among children. Leah uses insights from Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Bertrand Russell to explain the flaws in critical thinking among the general population that have led to this serious public health problem.

We are proud of these undergraduate students' contributions to the academic community. Nevertheless, we also want to thank the professors who supervised the writing of these papers in their classes. From Lynchburg College, these professors are Dr. Kate Gray (Gannicott), Dr. Dan Lang (Haggerty and Scanlon), Dr. Dan Messerschmidt (another advisor of Scanlon), Dr. Steve Dawson (Warkoski), and Dr. Jessica Brophy (Bigl). From other ACTC institutions, the supervising faculty members are Dr. Darragh Martin (Klempay) and Dr. Giovanni Ildefonso (de la Piedra)--both at Columbia University, Dr. Victoria Myers at Pepperdine University (Slattery), Dr. Andrew Moore at St. Thomas University (Ball), Dr. James Vest at

Rhodes College (Bierdz), Dr. John Verdi (Fogleman) and Dr. Henry Higuera (Goldman)—both at St. John's College, Annapolis, Dr. David Sweet and Dr. Tyler Travilian at the University of Dallas (Reilly), Dr. Katharine Streip at Concordia University (Sordili), and Dr. Elizabeth Dobbins at Samford University (Bayless).

This twenty-second issue of the *Agora* demonstrates the strengths of undergraduates' writing on core texts. We appreciate their thoughtful essays that help us reconsider the events and issues of our contemporary world in a new light.

Lyndall Nairn  
*Agora* Editor  
Lynchburg College  
Lynchburg, Virginia